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DISCUSSION OF POLICE ADMINISTRATION

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THE police commissioner has just told you of his many plans for increasing the efficiency of New York's police force. During his administration he has inaugurated and developed systems of control which if permitted to continue in their growth will do much to change the attitude of the police force and of the public toward it. Unfortunately, no commissioner will ever be able, regardless of his wisdom or ability, to rid the department of its greatest defects, namely, too many commissioners, and too much politics. All the good that Commissioner Woods and his able assistants may be able to accomplish during their brief term may be swept aside by the signature of a new commissioner, coming direct from the office of the politicians who seek continually to control the department and its activities. These are defects for which the public, represented by the legislature, is responsible, and which can be removed only by giving to the police commissioner surety of tenure sufficiently long to fix properly the attitude of the force, to restore the confidence of the people in their policemen, and to establish precedents in wise administration from which no successor can afford to depart.

Those of us who have studied police procedure here and abroad, and have read from time to time the exposures of the corruption within New York's police department have found the cause of the inefficiency of the police, not only of New York, but of America, in rapid changes of administration, and in failure to free the police from the grip of the politician. New York has had ten police commissioners in thirteen years. In considering that fact remember that the police commissioner, who is appointed by the mayor and is removable by him at will, is in complete control of the 11,000 policemen. He is empowered to change at pleasure every particle of administrative procedure, and to create policies of law enforcement, or non-enforcement, which may be influenced by a conscientious desire to provide a policy representative of public opinion, or prompted by the orders of his political masters.

Some students of municipal government deem it proper that administrators in municipalities of a cosmopolitan nature, in the interest of what they call "representative government," should create and maintain independent policies of law enforcement. So far as police organization and administration are concerned, however, nothing is more destructive

of efficiency and more conducive to corruption. This is the more evidently true when these policies are subject to frequent change. By "a policy of law enforcement" is meant nothing more or less than the determination as to which of the statutes governing the sale of liquors and prohibiting gambling and prostitution will be enforced by the police, and to what extent. It means a deliberate choice as to the voiding of statutes or the enforcing of them. It means the usurpation of legislative powers and functions by municipal administrators. It means stating to the 11,000 policemen, though never openly or in writing, that certain of the statutes, which the policeman as a recruit was told to regard as sacred, must not be enforced, or must be enforced only in a "liberal" manner. In other words, it means that officials elected or appointed to enforce without fear or favor every law, tell their subordinates to close their eyes or wink at violations of certain of the statutes. The policeman of more than a few years of service in New York has lived to see these policies change from a strict enforcement to a "personal-liberty" kind of enforcement, or indeed to a complete non-enforcement. In view of such training, it is not difficult to understand how an individual policeman may create his own policy of law enforcement as affecting other statutes, and collect a revenue for himself. Such a policeman could not be expected to regard himself as any more corrupt, to say the least, than his superior who brings about the nullification of a statute for political reasons.

A police commissioner usually comes into office a stranger to the force. The force and its superior officers are the same as were in command during the preceding administration. The new commissioner has but five men in his entire organization upon whom he can entirely depend, or from whom he can expect instant and absolute loyalty, namely, his four deputies and his secretary. These officials, because of the magnitude of the administrative problem of the department, are of necessity burdened with routine duties, which deprive them of much time for field observation. On the other hand the commissioner has a force of 11,000 men, some honest, some dishonest, some loyal, some disloyal, some good workers, some shirkers, some energetic and eager to serve the colors, others awaiting an opportunity to betray them, but all standing aside gazing and wondering what the new "boss" is going to do with them; what are to be his policies of law enforcement; who are his political masters; to whom they may themselves go for political preferment or political protection; how much the commissioner knows; how easily he can be fooled; and last, but by no means least, how long he will remain. To the faithful and loyal members of the force, the last puzzling question, how long

he will remain, means much. If it could but be answered truthfully and definitely, a police commissioner would be able within a short time to rally to his support the faithful men on the force, armed against the betrayers. Those who love their city would soon drive from the force those who have from time to time brought shame upon it, but since the question is not answered, those who would be loyal cannot be loyal. Those who would join the commissioner in bringing the force to a high standard of efficiency can under present conditions do so only at their peril, because of the old saying in police circles, "Commissioners come and commissioners go, but the system lives on forever."

When I say the "system" I am not referring to the mythological so-called "system," but the real "system" in the police department, namely, politics. I do not mean politics in the ordinary sense of the term. The present commissioner will perhaps tell you that there is no politics in the police department to-day. By that he means that under the present administration political influence or interference cannot operate for or against any member of the force; but that is only one phase of political activity. By politics in police, I mean essentially the political control of the department. That control you have under your present system whether you have a reform mayor and police commissioner, or a Tammany Hall mayor and police commissioner. Political factors have the same grip on your police department to-day that they have always had; and you will never wrest the department from their grip until you lengthen and secure the tenure of office of the police commissioner, and take that officer from under the control of a political administration. I do not say that to reflect upon your present mayor, because I believe the city of New York has never had a more honest and efficient administration, not only of the police department, but of the whole city government, than it has to-day. But in the administration of police you must look further than to-day. You must remember that the inspector, the captain who wears the gold shield to-day, does not pass away with Commissioner Woods or Mayor Mitchel, but goes on after the commissioner; and if he would progress in the police department, he must keep his "weather eye" turned toward the future. No matter how much he loves Commissioner Woods, no matter how much respect he has for the mayor, no matter how honest he may be in his heart, he must always say to himself, "I'd like to be loyal to this fellow, but he'll be here only a short time, and my loyalty to him may mean my undoing by his successor." The inspector of police who has seen years of service must always keep before him the fact that the next commissioner may come to police headquarters direct from the office of his political master, whose chief

gangster or gunman the inspector put in jail at the direction of an honest police commissioner.

To have a successful police administration it is necessary to have an experienced administrator at the head of the force, and to have the force reflect the attitude of that administrator, the commissioner. Naturally, to reflect his attitude they must understand him; they must get his point of view. New York's police force, although at present perhaps more efficient than in the past, has not yet acquired the proper point of view. The old "cop" of the days gone by, who believed his chief function to be "keeping out of trouble"—doing as little as possible and performing services somewhat like a night watchman—has no place in this age of efficient police work. The policeman of to-day must be of superior intelligence, and must understand, if he is to be efficient, that he is a social-service agent of the government. He must acquire knowledge of those who live or are active in the neighborhood he patrols—not with the idea of dictating their moral standards or bulldozing them into obedience to the law, but of being an aid to them, an agent of the government in assisting them. Not only does he stand for the criminal statutes and their enforcement, but he is the agent, or should be, of every branch of the city government.

Our policemen will never fully appreciate their responsibilities, will never fully understand the importance of their position, and the opportunities for good that go with it, until they have had a single police commissioner in command of them long enough to secure their loyalty and confidence, and to inspire them with a point of view which will make of New York's police the greatest force for social good in the world.

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